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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 13 BRASILIA 000228

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DEPT PASS USAID TO LAC/RSD, LAC/SAM, G/ENV, PPC/ENV  
TREASURY FOR USED IBRD AND IDB AND INTL/MDB  
USDA FOR FOREST SERVICE: LIZ MAHEW  
INTERIOR FOR DIR INT AFFAIRS: K WASHBURN  
INTERIOR FOR FWS: TOM RILEY  
INTERIOR FOR NPS: JONATHAN PUTNAM  
INTERIOR PASS USGS FOR INTERNATIONAL: J WEAVER  
JUSTICE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES: JWEBB  
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL: CAM HILL-MACON  
USDA FOR ARS/INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH: G FLANLEY  
NSF FOR INTERNATIONAL: HAROLD STOLBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SENV EAGR FAID TBIO ECON SOCI XR BR

SUBJECT: SOUTH AMERICA ESTH NEWS, NUMBER 106

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11. The following is the 106th in a series of newsletters, published by the Brasilia Regional Environmental Hub, covering environment, science and technology, and health news in South America. The information below was gathered from news sources from across the region, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Hub office or our constituent posts. Addressees who would like to receive a user-friendly email version of this newsletter should contact Larissa Stoner at stonerla@state.gov. The e-mail version also contains a calendar of upcoming ESTH events in the region.

NOTE: THE NEWSLETTER IS NOW ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE BRASILIA INTRANET PAGE, BY CLICKING ON THE 'HUB' LINK.

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Agriculture  
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## 13. Colombia's 'Green Flowers'

FEB. 12, 2008 - Long before many industries jumped aboard the "going green" trend, Asocolflores, the Colombian flower growers' trade association, quietly began to positively change the environmental and social practices of flower farms through a rigorous farm certification program called Florverde. Today more than 171 farms, comprising over half of the acreage devoted to growing flowers in Colombia, have qualified for, or are in the process of qualifying for, Florverde(R) certification. One of the key goals of Florverde is to reduce or eliminate the use of chemicals and pesticides through the use of sustainable agricultural practices including biological and natural controls. To be certified Florverde, farms must comply with all compulsory standards, including operational and social guidelines.

Source - Earthtimes.com

## 14. ABN AMRO Unit Was Risk-Analysis Pioneer

JAN. 2008 - The recent takeover of Dutch-owned ABN AMRO Bank by a consortium led by the Royal Bank of Scotland garnered a great deal

of press coverage on account of its US\$99.3 billion price tag,

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reportedly the biggest acquisition in banking history. Overshadowed amid questions of future market share and looming job losses, however, is whether the consortium will continue to push environmental and social (E&S) risk analysis in Latin America, as ABN AMRO did. Latin American banks, unlike many of those in the United States, Europe and Japan, rarely do E&S risk analysis before lending to corporate clients. But the Brazilian subsidiary of ABN AMRO became a regional pioneer in this practice and a major proponent of it in Latin America. Though ABN AMRO has by no means been the sole advocate of sustainable lending in developing nations, experts say its efforts have stood out. As part of its follow-up research, ABN AMRO has checked with enforcement authorities as well as non-governmental groups that monitor the environmental and social performance of Brazilian companies. In Brazil and elsewhere, analysts will be watching to see whether such work will be encouraged under Banco Santander, the new owner of ABN AMRO's Brazilian operations.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

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Health  
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#### 15. Health Alert in Paraguay Following Outbreak of Dengue

JAN. 30, 2008 - A health alert has been declared in Paraguay in a bid to stop a new outbreak of dengue fever. Health workers have detected some 150 suspected cases of the mosquito-borne disease so far this year. The virus disease seems on its way to becoming endemic in the heart of South America. A senior Paraguayan official said there was concern because neighboring Brazil had also seen a recent rise in dengue and some dozen cases of yellow fever in tropical areas. Last year, at least 17 people died from dengue fever in Paraguay and the authorities were criticized for not acting sooner. President Nicanor Duarte's government was accused of missing warning signs in January a year ago and failing to tackle the disease properly. A total of some 27,000 cases were registered during 2007. The Paraguayan Health Minister, Oscar Martinez, said the latest suspected cases were being analyzed.

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Source - MercoPress

#### 16. Venezuela: Illegal Mining Aggravates Malaria Cases

JAN. 21, 2008 - Illegal mining in the southeastern part of the state of Bolivar (Venezuela) near the border with Brazil and Guyana has increased cases of malaria, which in 2007 reached 28,800 cases in the region and 40,500 in the entire country (population 27 million).

The illegal quest for gold and diamonds has lead to "an invasion of humans in the habitat of anopheles, the mosquito which transmits malaria," explained Ana Gineth Morales, head of the health department in Boliviar. These nomadic explorers bring the disease into the cities and make control of the disease difficult, she added.

Source - Tierramerica

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Forests  
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#### 17. In U.S., Approval of Timber Import Bill is looking Likely

JAN. 2008 - Environmentalists are hailing a bill moving through the U.S. Congress that would impose the strongest controls enacted by any country on international trade in illegal timber, including coveted mahogany from Honduras and Peru. A product of discussions

between the non-governmental Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and U.S. timber and paper industry associations, the bill seems almost certain to pass in the coming months. Called the Combat Illegal Logging Act in the Senate and the Legal Timber Protection Act in the House, the bill sets economic and criminal penalties for importers who knowingly purchase wood and wood products harvested in violation of foreign or international laws. Environmental experts say it could go a long way in fighting the illegal cutting of mahogany and cedar in the protected rainforest and indigenous lands of Honduras as well as in Peru's Alto Purus National Park and other protected areas of the Peruvian Amazon departments of Madre de Dios and Ucayali. Enforcement would fall to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with support at the border from the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Agriculture.

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Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

#### ¶8. Brazil's President Downplays Extent Of Deforestation and Is Contradicted By Ministers

JAN. 31, 2008 - President Lula tried to dismiss the significance of recent government reports about increasing Amazon deforestation as merely "noise." Lula said that the satellite deforestation data recently released by the National Space Research Institute (INPE) is "under investigation," and that "no one can be blamed" for the problem. Meanwhile, Environment Minister Marina Silva, who last week blamed the spike in deforestation on cattle and soybean growers, visited one of the worst affected areas, Sinop, Mato Grosso, and underscored that that the INPE data are correct. The minister met with Mato Grosso Governor Blairo Maggi, whose state appears on top of the list of worst deforested areas. According to Maggi, "The data for April to September are not correct." Science and Technology Minister Sergi Rezende said that INPE's satellite monitoring of the Amazon forest has 95% to 97% accuracy: "It's interesting to note that when INPE was reporting that deforestation was dropping, no one questioned the figures."

Source - US Embassy Brazil Public Affairs.

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Wildlife  
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#### ¶9. Galapagos Sea Lion Massacre Fuels Conservation Fears

JAN. 29, 2008 - Ecuadorian authorities are investigating a massacre of 53 sea lions in the pristine Galapagos Islands which has raised concerns about whether the government can protect the famous archipelago. Park rangers found the decomposing sea lions with their skulls crushed on a remote islet earlier this month. Now reports of tourists meddling with animals are prompting calls for stricter controls at the UN World Heritage site. Ecuador is already debating whether to limit growing tourism on Galapagos and has expelled hundreds of illegal workers to protect the natural reserve after the United Nations warned in 2007 that the site was in danger. Authorities don't know why the sea lions were butchered. Traffickers

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often kill animals to take organs in demand for traditional medicines. But these sea lions were untouched except for head wounds, officials said.

Source - BBC

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Fishing & Marine Conservation  
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#### ¶10. Experts Warning That Lake Titicaca Fish Are In Danger

JAN. 2008 - Officials with the bi-national Peruvian and Bolivian

agency in charge of managing and protecting Lake Titicaca say that if current fishing practices and the introduction of non-native carnivorous fish species into the lake aren't addressed, seven species of fish known to inhabit the lake could go extinct within the next ten years. Experts say that in addition to the problems of overfishing and pollution, there's also predation: non-native pejerrey and trout species, which were introduced to the lake some fifty years ago, are eating other fish species in the lake. In March, Bolivia will launch an effort to remove duckweed (*Lemna gibba*) from its portion of the lake. On Peru's side, he notes, some 35,000 hectares (87,000 acres) have been cleared of the aquatic plants, which cause eutrophication. Duckweed has spread widely, particularly on the Bolivian side, on account of the nitrogen and phosphorous reaching Titicaca in discharges and runoff from upstream sources.

Source - EcoAmericas

#### ¶11. In Argentina, Paran River Bounty Dwindles

JAN. 2008 - News of declining commercial fish stocks might bring saltwater images to mind. But in Argentina, scientists are warning about declining commercial-fish populations far from the coast-specifically, along the Paran, South America's second-longest river. And lawmakers are responding. The Argentine Congress has declared a one-year emergency during which exports of Paran fish will be limited to 12,000 tons. That's nearly a third of the volume that was exported in 2006, the last year for which figures are available. And-on paper, at least-the limits are all the more strict

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considering that nearly all of the Paran catch typically is sold abroad. The new congressional emergency measure, promulgated in November, directs Argentina's Agriculture, Ranching, Fishing and Food Secretariat to develop a fish-protection program. It also requires national and provincial authorities to provide economic assistance for artisanal fishermen and eventually help them find alternative work.

Source - Eco Americas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

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Science & Technology  
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#### ¶12. Chile Innovation Investment 'May Hit US\$200 Million'

FEB. 05, 2008 - The Chilean government is investing a record US\$100 million in innovative projects this year. The figure is up from the US\$73 million invested in 2007 thanks to an increase in a mining tax, which is expected to yield US\$150 million in 2008. All tax proceeds will go into the two-year-old Fund for Innovation for Competitiveness, run by InnovaChile, the innovation department of the Ministry of the Economy. The government forecasts that total 2008 investment in research and development (R&D) will hit the US\$200 million mark if private sector contributions are added. A new tax incentive for private companies to invest in R&D may result in more private money going into innovation. Most of the resources will go to programs to improve technology and manufacturing processes in five priority sectors: aquaculture, software development for international markets, tourism (improving special interest tourism, such as eco-tourism), mining, and fresh fruits and processed foods.

Source - SciDev

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Energy  
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#### ¶13. Chile Ready to Announce Electricity Saving Measures

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FEB. 07, 2008 - Depleted reservoirs, the recent closure of a major power generating plant and an expected consumption surge in March have Chilean authorities concerned about Chile's ability to meet its growing electricity needs. It's not yet clear what exactly the government's soon-to-be-announced measures will entail. Analysts, however, say one possibility could be a slight voltage reduction. Chilean residences are wired to receive 220 volts of electricity. That voltage can be tweaked by as much as 7% either up or down without damaging household electric devices. The government might also authorize electricity providers to establish rate incentives for customers willing to reduce consumption.

Source - MercoPress

#### ¶14. Peru: Biodiesel and Ethanol Surge Ahead

FEB. 05, 2008 - The Government of Peru has mandated that starting January 2009, diesel 2 must contain 2% biodiesel, rising to 5% in ¶2011. Similarly, gasolines must contain 7.8% ethanol as of January ¶2010. Grupo Romero, Peru's largest domestic business group, inaugurated its first biodiesel plant just south of Lima at end-January, with a capacity of 3,000 barrels per day. The plant will use imported soy until plantations in the southern department of Ica are ready. Grupo Romero plans to have its second biodiesel plant ready by mid-year, in the jungle department of San Martin. This plant will be vertically integrated with its own supply of palm oil, which the company has already begun planting in San Martin and Loreto. Grupo Romero already has a sugar cane-based ethanol project in the northern coastal department of Piura with a capacity of 300,000 liters/day. U.S. firm Maple Energy has a 30 million gallons of ethanol per year project in the same area.

Source - LIMA 00000213

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Extractive Industries  
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#### ¶15. Ecuador Official: Protect Indians from Oil Drilling

FEB. 11, 2008 - Ecuador's attorney general urged the government to negotiate with oil firms to stop drilling for crude in a protected

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area deep in the Amazon jungle where Indian tribes hide from the outside world. That recommendation could affect operations several companies which have part of their oil blocks inside the 700,000 hectare (1.7 million acre) protected area home to two tribes of hunters and gatherers known as Tagaeri and Taromenani. President Rafael Correa, a former college professor who taught environmental economics, has vowed to protect the tribes from development after reports of deadly clashes between Indians wielding spears and illegal loggers armed with guns. Ecuador wants rich countries to pay \$350 million a year in exchange for it not extracting 1 billion barrels of oil under the Yasuni reserve. Quito says leaving the oil in the ground would protect the environment in the Amazon to the benefit of all countries.

Source- Planet Ark News (no link)

¶16. COMMENT FROM US EMBASSY QUITO: There is currently no drilling in the fields that overlap with Yasuni. Nor have there been environmental licenses issued to drill. But the fields do overlap with Yasuni because the companies' contracts were initiated before the protected area was delineated (and when it was delineated, apparently the govt allowed it cover the same territory). So there is potential for a future conflict. It looks like the Attorney General is trying to introduce the issue into the ongoing re-negotiations of the companies' contracts.

¶17. FOLLOW-UP NEWS: Authorities in Ecuador are investigating claims that up to 15 Amazonian tribespeople have been killed by illegal loggers. The group, from the Taromenane and Tagaeri tribe, was attacked in the eastern Yasuni National Park - a protected area - reports say.

## 118. Chinese Company Buys Into Copper and Gold Mines in Peru

JAN. 30, 2008 - China's largest metal trader announced it had received approval to take control of two Peruvian mines in an operation involving 453 million US dollars. China Minmetals said it was purchasing a majority stake in Canada's Northern Peru Copper, thereby acquiring two Peruvian mines one of copper and another of gold. The two Chinese companies would then have control of the Canadian company's El Galeno copper and gold mine and Hilorico gold mine in northern Peru.. Under the deal, China Minmetals will team

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up with Jiangxi Copper to buy 95.92% in the Vancouver-based Northern Peru Copper for 455 million Canadian dollars (453 million US dollars). Reportedly, the development of the Galeno project will require an investment of around 1.5 billion US dollars and is expected to operate for a 22-year period beginning in 2012. Minmetals said the acquisition was met with a positive response from the Chinese government. The company also has interests in other South American countries, Chile, Argentina and Bolivia.

Source - MercoPress

## 119. Illegal Mining Prompts Guyana Border Incident

JAN. 2008 - Venezuela and Guyana sought to ease diplomatic tensions after Venezuelan troops entered Guyanese territory Nov. 15 and blew up two gold-mining dredges near their common border. The incident, in which 36 Venezuelan soldiers entered the disputed Essequibo Region by helicopter and dynamited the dredges on the Cuyuni River, drew protests from Guyana's government and opposition. In the process, it underscored the explosive nature of illegal gold mining in Guyana's Essequibo region, which borders Venezuela's Bolivar state and contains dense rainforests rich with coveted timber, aluminum and gold. Such mining has caused mercury contamination, deforestation, sedimentation and the destruction of important fish habitat. The two nations have since agreed to set up a working group to prevent similar incidents in the future. They also have pledged to continue working through the United Nations Good Officer process to settle the border dispute that has been simmering since 1899, when Venezuela claims it was robbed of the 56,000-square-mile (145,000-sq-km) Essequibo region by an international tribunal in Paris. But analysts fear illegal gold mining could continue to cause problems along the border by generating more environmental destruction. Mercury contamination, for instance, affects rivers used by minority indigenous Amerindian communities for food and bathing, and degrades farmland. Hydraulic mining, meanwhile, creates large pools of stagnant water that become breeding grounds for malaria-bearing mosquitoes.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

## 120. World Bank Official Discusses Green Policy in Region

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JAN. 2008 - Many countries in Latin America have common environmental concerns; yet they hope to cash in on high metals and petroleum prices. Those prices are fueling a boom in mining and oil drilling-and contributing to related environmental and social conflicts. Renan Poveda, senior environmental specialist in the World Bank's environment and sustainable development area, has examined green issues in various parts of the world ranging from Hawaii to Latin America. Poveda has been stationed for the past four years in the World Bank's Peru office, where he covers the Andean countries and some of the bank's projects in Bolivia. He sees a need for Latin American countries to formulate development strategies that identify where extractive activities such as mining and oil drilling should and should not be done. EcoAmericas January issue carries a Q&A with Poveda, please contact Larissa Stoner for complete report.

Source - EcoAmericas

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Sustainable Development  
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¶21. World Bank and IDB Approve Sustainable Development Loan in Bolivia

JAN. 17, 2008 - The World Bank approved, on 20 December 2007, a US\$ 20 million interest-free loan for local sustainable development in the Bolivian part of the Lake Titicaca watershed, by promoting tourism, protecting the archeological and cultural heritage of the area, providing basic water and sanitation services for the local population, and strengthening the management capacity of local governments. As a result of the project, 150,000 residents of Lake Titicaca's neighboring towns are expected to receive access to drinking water and solid waste collection and treatment services.

Source - World Bank

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General  
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¶22. Colombia, Costa Rica 'Top Ten' For Environment

FEB. 01, 2008 - Colombia and Costa Rica are among the top ten nations in a ranking of excellence in environmental performance. The 2008 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), conducted by US universities Yale and Columbia, was announced January 23 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Costa Rica was ranked fifth and Colombia ninth, behind the top ranking nations Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. "Ranking ninth amongst 149 countries around the world and second in America after Costa Rica is a great achievement for Colombia," says Marta Pizano, a Colombian biologist who last year received the Best of the Best prize from the US Environmental Protection Agency. The index measures 25 indicators in six different areas: environmental health, air pollution, water, productive natural resources, biodiversity and habitat, and climate change. Colombia performed particularly well in forestry, fisheries, cropland use and reducing local ozone - or ground level ozone, a pollutant from human activities that causes significant health problems.

Source - SciDev

¶23. Brazil Investigates Environmental, Evangelical Groups for Conduct in Amazon

JAN. 30, 2008 - Brazil's intelligence service said that a six-month investigation of environmental and evangelical groups active in the nation's Amazon rain forest found evidence of genetic resources being stolen and of activities that endanger the ethnic identity of Indian communities. The agency said it found evidence that NGOs had transferred indigenous knowledge of plants and animals to pharmaceutical companies and illegally extracted diamonds on indigenous land. Among the groups monitored is the Virginia-based Amazon Conservation Team, or ACT, that authorities say may be involved in biopiracy - the appropriation of the rain forest's biological riches by individuals or groups seeking to patent them. ACT allegedly transferred knowledge of the rain forest's plants and animals to foreign pharmaceutical companies. Authorities also recommended the investigation of Coordination of Indian Nations, a Brazilian NGO they say is partly funded by the World Wildlife Fund and that is allegedly involved in the illegal extraction of diamonds in the Cinta-Larga Indian reservation in the state of Rondonia.

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Source - Associated Press

#### ¶24. State Spying On Green Groups Alleged In Chile

JAN. 2008 - Environmental groups in Chile are complaining vociferously that they are being spied on by Chile's National Intelligence Agency (ANI). They have been reacting to a report last month in the Chilean daily La Tercera that ANI has been monitoring Chilean environmental campaigns against hydroelectric plants slated for the Aysn Region; a gold mining project high in the Andes called Pascua Lama; and a new Celulosa Arauco (Celco) pulp mill in Valdivia. Jose Ignacio Pinochet, a lawyer and executive director of Fiscalia del Medio Ambiente (Fima), a Chilean public interest environmental law group, tells EcoAmericas he believes such spying has indeed been occurring, calling it a "violation of citizen rights." "All environmental groups in Chile are being investigated," Pinochet says. "This is very serious, Pinochet points to the fact that computer hard drives have mysteriously gone missing from nearly every Chilean environmental group at some point over the past few years. So far, the government only affirms publicly that it is monitoring environmental conflicts and their participants, but it denies secret spying operations are taking place.

Source - EcoAmericas

SOBEL